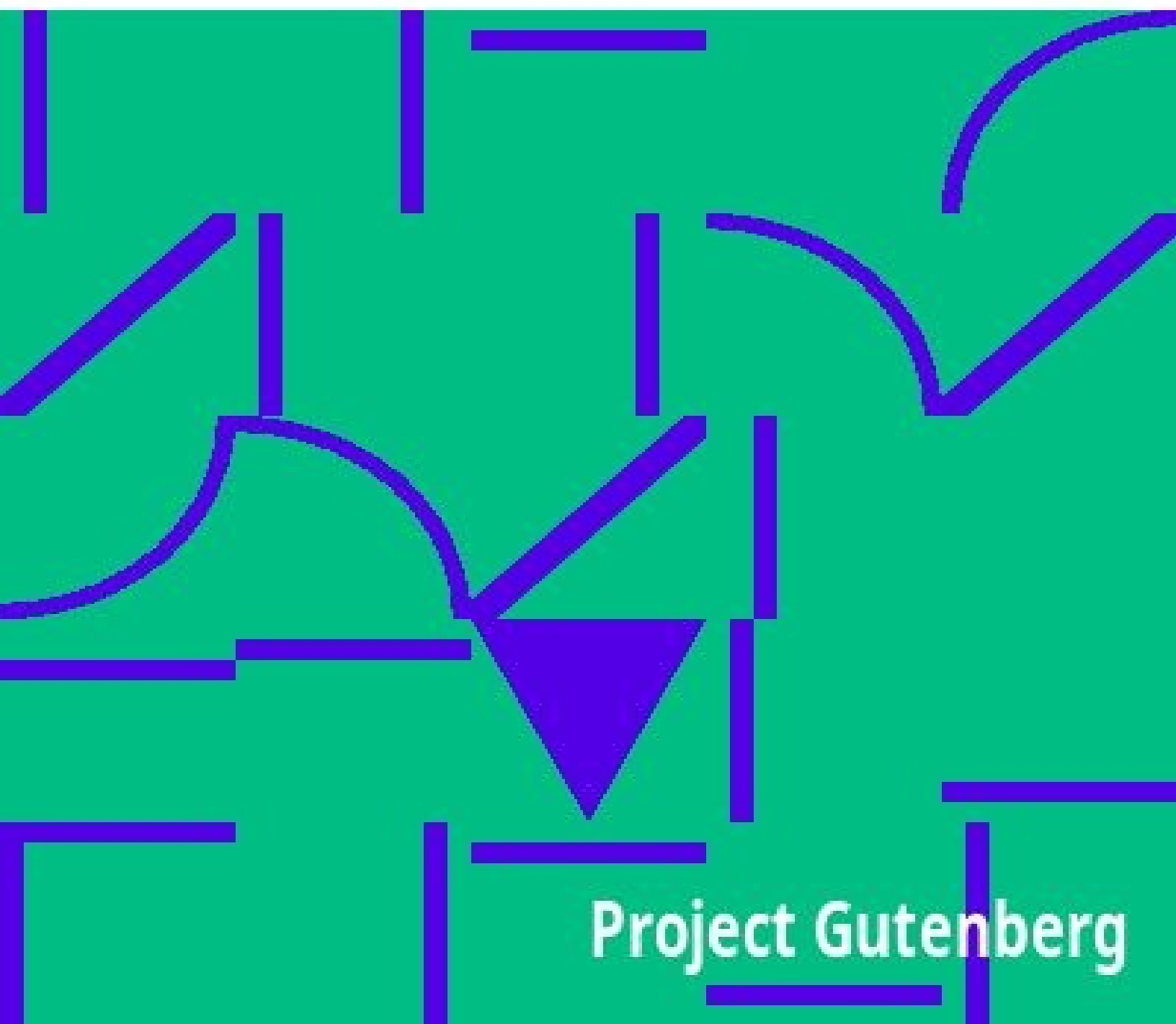


The Unthinking Destroyer

Rog Phillips



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THE UNTHINKING DESTROYER

by **ROG PHILLIPS**

Gordon and Harold both admitted the possibility of thinking entities other than human. But would they ever recognize the physical form of some of these beings?

"**H**HEY, Gordon!"

Gordon Marlow, Ph.D., straightened up and turned in the direction of the voice, the garden trowel dangling in his dirt-stained white canvas glove. His wide mouth broke into a smile that revealed even white teeth. It was Harold Harper, an undergraduate student, who had called.

"Hop over the fence and come in," Gordon invited.

He dropped the trowel and, taking off his work gloves, reached into his pocket and extracted an old pipe. He filled it, the welcoming smile remaining on his lips, while Harold Harper approached, stepping carefully between the rows of carrots, cabbages, and cauliflower.

Harold held a newspaper in his hand. When he reached Gordon Marlow he held it open and pointed to the headline. **ROBOT ROCKET SHIP TO MARS.**

Gordon took the paper and read the item, puffing slowly and contentedly on his old pipe. His eyes took on an interested look when he came to the reporter's speculations on the possibility of intelligent life on Mars.

Finally he handed the newspaper back to Harold.

"You know, Harold," he said, "I wonder if they would recognize intelligent life if they saw it on other planets."

"Of course they would," Harold replied. "Regardless of its form there would be

artifacts that only intelligent life could create."

"Would there?" Gordon snorted. "I wonder."

He squatted down, picking up the trowel and lazily poking it into the rich soil at his feet.

"That's why I wonder," he continued. "We are so prone to set up tests on what intelligent life is that we are likely to miss it entirely if it doesn't conform exactly to our preconceived notions. We assume that if a being is intelligent it must get the urge to build artifacts of some kind—pots and vases, houses, idols, machinery, metal objects. But **MUST** it? In order to do so it must have hands and perhaps legs. Suppose it doesn't have such things? Suppose that no matter how intelligent it might be, it could not do those things!"

"Then it wouldn't be intelligent, would it?" Harold asked, puzzled.

"We are assuming it is," Gordon said patiently. "There are other outlets for intelligence than making clay pots. As a last resort for an intelligent being there is always—thinking."

He chuckled at his joke.

Harold held a newspaper in his hands.

"I've often wondered what it would be like to be a thinking, reasoning being with no powers of movement whatsoever. With bodily energy provided automatically by environment, say, and all the days of life with nothing to do but think. What a chance for a philosopher! What depths of thought he might explore. What heights of intellectual perception he might attain. And if there were some means of contact with others of his kind, so that all could pool their thoughts and guide the younger generation, what progress such a race might make!"

"**A**ND so we see," Ont telepathed, "that there must be a Whole of which each of us is a part only. The old process which says 'I think, therefore I am,' has its fallacy in the statement, 'I think.' It assumes that that assertion is axiomatic and basic, when in reality it is the conclusion derived from a long process of

mental introspection. It is a theory rather than an axiom."

"But don't you think, Ont," Upt replied, "that you are confusing the noumenon with the phenomenon? What I mean is, the fact of thinking is there from the very start or the conclusion couldn't be reached; and the theoretical conclusion, as you call it, is merely the final recognition of something basic and axiomatic that was there all the time!"

"True," Ont replied. "But still, to the thinking mind, it is a theory and not an axiom. All noumena are there before we arrive at an understanding of them. Thought, if it exists as such, is also there. But the theoretical conclusion I think has no more degree of certainty than any other thing the mind can deal with. To say 'I think' is to assert the truth of an hypothesis which MAY be true, but not necessarily so. And then to conclude, 'Therefore I am,' is to advance one of the most shaky conclusions of all time. Underneath that so-called logical conclusion lies a metaphysics of being, a theory of Wholes, a recognition by differentiation of parts, with a denial of all but the one part set apart by that differentiation, and, in short, the most irrational hodgepodge of contradictory conclusions the thinking mind can conceive. This pre-cognition that enables one to arrive at the tenuous statement, 'I think, therefore I am,' is nicely thrown out by tagging it with another metaphysical intangible called illusion—as if the mind can separate illusion from reality by some absolute standard."

"I believe you're right, Ont," Upt replied slowly, his telepathed thoughts subdued with respect. "It is possible that the concept, 'I think,' is the illusion, while the so-called illusions are the reality."

"**E**VEN without the benefit of past thoughts," Gordon was saying, whacking off a weed a yard away and nearly upsetting himself, "a mind with nothing to do but think could accomplish miracles. Suppose it was not aware of any other thinking entity, though it might be surrounded by such similar entities. It would be born or come into existence some way, arrive at self-awareness and certain other awarenesses to base its thinking on, depending on its structure, and—" he looked up at Harold startled at his own conclusion—"it might even arrive at the ultimate solution to all reality and comprehend the foundations of the Universe!"

"And eventually be destroyed without any other entity having the benefit of it all," Harold commented dryly.

"What a pity that would be," Gordon murmured. "For the human race to struggle for hundreds of years, and have some unguessable entity on Mars do all that in one lifetime—and it all go to waste while some blundering ass lands on Mars and passes it by, looking for artifacts."

"BUT that is only the start in the blunders contained in that most profound philosophical revelation of old," Ont stated. "After arriving at a precarious conclusion about existence the ancients were not satisfied. They had to say, 'If I am I must have been created!' Then they go on and say, 'If I was created there must be a Creator!' And thus they soar from their precarious perch in existence, soar on nonexistent wings, and perch on the essence of evanescence! They do not recognize the alternative—that to exist does not necessarily imply a beginning. They do not recognize it because they have derived all their tools from reality around them and then denied the reality while accepting the validity of the tools of thought derived from it. And in this way they arrive at an absolute existence of Something they have never sensed or felt in any way, while denying all that they have felt and sensed, and give it attributes which their sense of idealism dictates it must have, and call it God."

"Then," Upt said thoughtfully, "I take it you are an atheist?"

"Certainly NOT," Ont growled telepathically.

"But you implied that in your comments on the conclusions of the ancients," Upt insisted.

"BUT if there are no artifacts," Harold said. "And no signs of intelligence whatever, how could we ever know that there WAS intelligence some place?"

"There must be some way," Gordon said. "I've taught logic at the U for fifteen

years now, and I've done a lot of thinking on the subject. If we ever reach Mars I think we should be very careful what we touch. We would be clumsy bulls in a china shop, not knowing the true worth of what we found, destroying what might be found to be priceless by later and more careful explorers. Mars is older than the Earth, and I can't help being convinced that there is SOME form of intelligence there."

"I IMPLIED no such thing as atheism," Ont insisted. "I merely said that the reasoning used by the ancients to arrive at the Creator was the most slipshod and illogical possible. There was another line used long ago that was more solid, but still very weak. It started out with the statement, 'I can be aware of nothing but thoughts.' External stimuli, if such there are, must be transformed into thought before I can be aware of them. Since I can never be aware of anything other than thought, why assume anything except thought exists? You, and all other things, exist as thoughts in my mind. There is nothing except what exists in my mind. Therefore, by that token, *I am God!*"

"But," Upt chuckled, "by the same token I can insist that *I am God* and you are just a product of my own creation."

"Yes," Ont agreed. "So it presents a dilemma. To resolve it, it is necessary to postulate a Supreme Mind, and to say that all things are just thoughts in God's Mind. That makes us both the same then and there is no argument about who is God!"

HAROLD kicked a lump of moist earth absently.

"It seems to me, Gordon," he said cautiously, "that you are biting the air with your teeth. If there are intelligent beings on Mars they will be aware of us, and make themselves known. If for no other reason they will do that to keep us from destroying them."

Gordon stood up and arched his back. He placed the garden trowel and gloves in the hip pocket of his coveralls and tapped his pipe on the heel of his shoe.

"You are assuming," he said, "that such beings can find a way to communicate with us. But have you thought of the possibility that if their abilities to reason are undetectable to us, by the same token they might not be aware we are intelligent? A mad bull in a pasture can think after a fashion, but would you try to reason with him? You would run if he charged you, and if he caught up with you and mauled you it would never occur to you to say, 'Look here, old boy. Let's talk this thing over first.'"

Both men laughed. Gordon started walking along the row he was standing in, toward the house. Harold kept pace.

"I see your point," he agreed.

"There are so many things we assume unconsciously when we speculate on the possibilities of intelligent life on Mars," Gordon went on, stooping over to pull a weed he had missed in his earlier weeding. "Rate of thinking is most probably a function of the material organism. Some other thinking creature might think faster or slower—perhaps so much so that we couldn't follow them even if we could tune in on their thoughts directly. Imagine a mind so ponderous that it takes a year for it to think as much as we do in a minute! Speed wouldn't necessarily have to be a function of size, either. Something incredibly small might take ages to think a simple thought. Have you ever heard the German tale called The Three Sleepers, Harold?"

"No, I haven't," Harold replied.

"WELL, in a small town in Germany there were three men so fat that they could barely walk. They spent nearly all their time sleeping. The only trouble was that every day or so someone would disturb them by singing or walking by, or some other trivial thing that is always happening in a small town, no matter how dead it is.

"One time when they were disturbed three days running they got mad and decided to go to the hills. They looked in the hills until they found a nice dry

cave. There they relaxed with deep sighs of contentment and went to sleep. Day after day, week after week, they slept undisturbed.

"Then one day a dog wandered into the cave, saw the three breathing mountains of flesh and heard the din of their deep snoring; and, scared half to death, let out a shrill yip and skedaddled.

"A week later one of the three sleepers stirred, opened his eyes briefly, and muttered, 'What was that noise?' Then he promptly went back to sleep.

"Ten days later the second sleeper stirred, muttered, 'Damfino,' and went back to sleep.

"Nearly a month later the third sleeper opened his eyes suddenly, stared at the roof of the cave for a moment, and said, 'I think it was a dog.' Then he went back to sleep. The way the story goes nothing ever came near the cave again, so they are still there, fast asleep—still fat, too, I suppose."

"I see what you're driving at," Harold said, chuckling over the story. "We assume that any intelligent being whatever, if it exists, thinks at the same RATE we do; but it might not."

"That's right," Gordon admitted. "And there are even more subtle assumptions we make unconsciously. For one, we assume that a thinking creature must think in the same way we do. We might not even be able to recognize thinking when we meet it, on another planet. No—" he held up his hand to silence the question on Harold's lips, "—I don't know exactly what I mean. I'll put it this way. We have steam engines and gasoline engines. We also have electric motors. Suppose we have steam-engine thought. How would we recognize electric-motor thinking?"

"Or perhaps a little closer to what I'm trying to express, we have arithmetic and algebra. Suppose with our arithmetic minds with no slightest inkling of the existence of a variable, we run into an algebra mind? We might mistake it for something far removed from thinking or intelligence. We go on the assumption that anything that doesn't stomp up, give a salute, and solemnly announce 'How', is unintelligent."

"It might just be more interested in its own thoughts than in the visitors from Earth," Harold suggested.

"It might," Gordon said. "Or it might be intensely curious and studying the

Earthmen very closely with senses other than sight and hearing."

"**B**UT," Ont added thoughtfully, "although the conclusion that we are all thoughts in the mind of the Creator is logically unshakeable, it isn't very satisfying, from a logical point, because it makes God nothing more than the compromising of a cute dilemma. It places the Creator in the same light as the final decision to locate the Capitol of the United States at Washington."

"Where's that?" Upt asked quickly.

"I don't know," Ont said testily. "That's just something I picked up out of the blue, so to speak. Inspirational thought. For all I know it's just a figment of my imagination."

"I've had inspirational thoughts too," Upt said excitedly. "I haven't spoken of them to you because I was afraid you might think I was becoming disorganized in my thoughts."

"I've done a lot of thinking about the inspirational stuff I get now and then," Ont said matter-of-factly. "If it came all the time I would be inclined to think it was the Voice of the Supreme Being Itself! But it doesn't come that way."

"Neither does mine," Upt said. "I often think there must be angels that hover over us at times and bless us with their wise thoughts, perhaps looking into us to see if we are 'ready' yet. When I seem to sense these powerful thoughts about me I try to feel humble and worshipful. I hope in that way one of them will see fit to reveal himself to me someday."

"They might," Ont said hopefully. "I wouldn't mind actually talking to one of them myself. But speaking of that, we don't know for sure that these inspirational thoughts aren't actually our own. They SEEM different, but that may be because they arise in some part of our deep subconscious thought processes. I've been trying to extend my sense of awareness in order to reach into my subconscious mind and actually plumb it to its depths. One thing I've found is that most of my REAL thinking goes on there, and only rises to the surface of consciousness when it is completed! That lends probability to the theory that ALL such voices of inspiration are merely my own subconscious

mind giving me the end products of carefully thought out trains of reasoning it had dreamed up."

"I think I'll try that line of development myself," Upt said. "I'd never thought of it. Maybe inspiration is only subconscious thought rising to the surface of consciousness. Maybe it is. But if so, I'll be very disappointed. I'd hoped sometime to be able to commune with some intelligence infinitely superior to mine and really learn the true nature of things."

"I SINCERELY hope I'm wrong about it," Ont said. "I too would like to believe that there is more in reality than just us. I wonder if other kinds of entities are possible? I mean thinking beings with different forms, different senses, perhaps different types of thinking. It may be they exist and we aren't equipped to detect them. They may be around us all the time, aware of us and our puerile thoughts, but so superior to us in every way that they don't think it worth while even to consider our feeble cogitations."

"I wouldn't call YOUR cogitations feeble, Ont," Upt exclaimed admiringly.

"That is a point of relativity," Ont said, somewhat flattered. "It does seem in vain, though. We spend our existence in solving the problems of reality, and when we have solved them we have no need of the solution. It gives us a feeling of satisfaction to gain the theoretical basis of reality from our point of view. But I for one would feel much better if we could be of service to some entity who is unable to accomplish that himself, but might be able to comprehend it if we taught him."

"All very noble," Upt said skeptically. "But I can't even imagine a thinking creature different from us in any way."

"That's why it's so difficult," Ont said. "In our own minds we tend to become absolute rather than relative in our conceptions. Some other entity might, for example, think much more slowly than we, or with incredible rapidity, so that our thoughts would be sluggish to him, or so swift that he would never be able to grasp them until long after we were gone."

"Also, we tend to think that thought as we experience it, is the only possible type

of thought. In reality there may be others. Different mental principles. Different material structure. Perhaps concepts outside our ability to grasp, while ours might be outside the ability of such creatures to grasp also."

"I don't believe I grasp what you're trying to say," Upt hesitated.

"Well, put it this way," Ont said patiently. "All things are relative. Why not thought? It might be possible to have two thinking minds which are relatively non-thinking. Each, from EVERY standard of the other, being totally thoughtless and without intelligence or mind."

"Now you're going too far," Upt said. "Thought is thought, I think, and—it's real. If any other entity thinks, its thinking must be real too."

"Of course," Ont murmured. "You miss the point entirely. If from every possible angle, some entity, to YOU, can't think and doesn't, it is non-thinking and unintelligent. Right?"

GORDON and Harold paused at the edge of the garden.

"Nice crop of vegetables you have there, Gordon," Harold said appreciatively.

"Thanks," Gordon said. "Say, wouldn't your wife like some fresh vegetables?"

Without waiting for an answer he stepped back into the garden, taking a knife from his pocket.

"These are nice now," he said, bending over and cutting. "Won't be much longer though. Brown spots developing already. I'll scrape off the brown stuff for you, but tell your wife to cook them right away. In a couple of days they'll spoil."

"UPT!" Ont exclaimed, exasperated. "Why don't you answer me, Upt? Upt! Where are you, Upt? Why don't you answer?"

"**T**HERE you are," Gordon said, smiling, as he handed Harold the head of cauliflower.

"Thanks," Harold said, accepting the white, fresh head, and balancing it in his palm.

The two men continued up the walk to the house.

"As I was saying," Gordon took up their conversation, "when men get to Mars, if they aren't careful they may destroy a civilization, or even thousands of intelligent beings, without knowing it...."

THE END

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